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The Kennedy Briefing

In the exchange between former Vice President Richard Nixon and President Kennedy over intelligence briefings during the 1960 campaign, the most curious factor is not Mr. Nixon's "misunderstanding" but the nature of the briefing itself.

The former vice president, in a new book called "Six Crises," accused Mr. Kennedy of endangering American foreign policy during the campaign by calling for intervention in Cuba. Mr. Nixon had been told that Mr. Kennedy had been briefed on Cuba and apparently assumed that the Central Intelligence Agency had told him of the plans for an invasion. The White House replied—with former CIA Director Allen Dulles' concurrence — that candidate Kennedy had not been told of the invasion plans during pre-election briefings.

Mr. Nixon's erroneous assumption that Mr. Kennedy knew of the plans for the invasion was a logical conclusion to draw, if one believes that such briefings have any meaning. It would appear that Mr. Kennedy *should* have been told of these plans which, as we now know from hindsight, he felt subsequently called upon to execute. If there is any value to be derived from intelligence briefings for presidential candidates, it is that certain delicate areas can be kept above partisan politics because of their special sensitivity when the presidential nominees are privy to plans in the making.

Yet Mr. Kennedy was not informed of the Cuban invasion plans, an evolving policy which, as we now know, was more controversial than most others inherited by the Kennedy administration. The omission seems to have been of serious proportion, and we are compelled to ponder whether the confidences afforded presidential candidates are taken as seriously as they ought to be.